

*February 23, 2014*

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10).**

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever. (Psalms 111:10).**

Are you detecting a theme here, my friends? These similar verses tell us some things, including that the only way to wisdom and understanding in this world is to have a healthy fear of the Lord. We are surrounded by so-called “leaders” and really, really smart people who have no such fear. So, we end up with great pearls of “understanding” and “wisdom” such as (1) the arctic blast that has set record low temperatures this year is a result of global warming (so-called “anthropogenic climate change”), (2) spending \$21 trillion over the last 50 year years to fight poverty without the slightest hint of success is wise, (3) men marrying men and women marrying women is perfectly proper and should be legally sanctioned, and so on. Shamelessly, the worldling puffs himself up with titles, degrees, honors and such, and creates his own wisdom.

But, as these verses tell us, no man is really wise until he fears the Lord. Indeed, that fear of our Lord is the principal part of wisdom, and is a tell-tale sign of grace. Everybody fears something or somebody. As a former co-employee of mine used to say, “Everybody works for somebody.” The key is who or what do you fear?

Warren G. Harding was elected president of the United States in 1920. He promised a return to normalcy after World War I and 8 years of tyrannical rule by Woodrow Wilson. (For example, Wilson saw to it that dozens were imprisoned for speaking out against the war, under so-called espionage laws, including presidential candidate Debs). [1916 campaign promise; Debs million votes; no commutation; after that 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment law solidified]. So far as I can determine, Harding had absolutely no fear of God. He spent his years in pathological adultery, siring illegitimate children, drinking (notwithstanding Prohibition being the law of the land in those days) and compulsive gambling. But in August, 1923,

after weeks of traveling around the western half of this country and Alaska, he became violently ill and died in a fancy San Francisco hotel. First-hand accounts of his deathbed scene included:

*Without warning, Harding 'stiffened out and had a very frightened expression and became pale and broke out in a profuse perspiration, showed irritability,' said (attending physician) Boone. \* \* \* 'I don't know what happened to me', said Warren (Harding), 'very strange, sinking feeling that I have never experienced before.'*

So, sooner or later, the wicked have fear. But the “fear” described in these verses is an awe and reverence of the divine Being and a desire to serve and worship him in a right manner. This fear is well-described at Psalm 119:120: **My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.**

Now consider this unique analysis of that verse from John Gill:

***My flesh trembleth for fear of thee***

Not for fear of the wrath of God coming down upon himself, nor for fear of eternal damnation; but for fear of what was coming upon the wicked, for their sins and transgressions. The word used signifies such a dread and horror, which seizes a man to such a degree, that it makes the hair of his flesh to stand up; see Psalms 119:53 (“Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law”) and Job 4:14-15 (“Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up”).

***and I am afraid of thy judgments;***

not of their coming down upon him, but upon the wicked; the thought of which is more awful to good men than to the wicked themselves; and especially when under any darkness, doubts, and fears; lest, being conscious to themselves of their own weakness, they should be left to join with the wicked in their sins, and so be partakers of their plagues.

So, today, I talk about the fear of God. Or as one of WBC's more cryptic signs simply says: "Fear God."

**Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord. (Psalms 128:1).**

**Fear God, and give glory to him. (Revelation 14:7).**

This exhortation is not only found in the previously-mentioned texts, but in many other Scriptures this message is pressed with much vehemency upon the children of men.

These verses require us to fear that God **AND** his word.

## **GOD**

Who is the God to be feared? I submit not that God who is unable to discern between the Jacobs and Esaus, who has no control or influence over "disasters" and "catastrophes", who stands by in a hand-wringing condition when "bad things happen to good people" and who "hates the sin but loves the sinner." This is the god the whole world recognizes and, from time to time, calls upon when the spirit moves them or when they are looking square in the face of some raging tornado, a violent tsunami, or the like. But this is not a god to fear, and this is certainly not **THE** "God" of these (and other) verses.

These verses enjoin fear of the true and living God, the maker of the worlds, the upholder of all things by the word of his power. This God holds that incomprehensible majesty in comparison of which all nations are less than the drop of a bucket. This God is he that fills heaven and earth, and is everywhere present with the children of men, beholding evil and good; for he has set his eyes upon all their ways. And this God is he who has the power to kill and make alive. **I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39).** That's the God you better fear!

God may well be called the fear of his people, not only because they have by his grace made him the object of their fear, but because of the dread and terrible

majesty that is in him. He is a mighty God, a great and terrible, and with God is terrible majesty. (Nehemiah 1:5, 4:14, 9:32; Job 37:22). Who knows the power of his anger?

**The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. (Nahum 1:5, 6).**

**Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. (Isaiah 8:13).**

Set his majesty before the eyes of your souls, and let his Excellency make you afraid with godly fear.

Here are additional features that cause God's people to fear him –

- His presence is dreadful. John says: **And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. (Revelation 1:17).**
- His greatness and majesty highlights our vileness. **Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. (Daniel 10:8).**
- His goodness to us. **[A]nd they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it. (Jeremiah 33:9). Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee. (Psalms 31:19).**
- His names. **That thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD. (Deuteronomy 28:58). Holy and reverend is his name. (Psalms 111:9). So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. (Isaiah 59:19).**
- He is a king and master. **For I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen. (Malachi 1:14). And if I be a master, where is my fear? (Malachi 1:6).**

- His worship services. Serve the Lord with fear. **But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple. (Psalms 5:7)** The description of Christ in Revelation 1 walking in the midst of his churches – i.e. his countenance like the sun at full strength, his head and hair white as snow, his eyes like a flame of fire and his voice as the sound of many waters—depicts dread/fear in his service in the church.
- Incidents of God’s justice for want of Godly fear, such as: (1) Nadab and Abihu who were burned to death with fire from heaven (Leviticus 10:1, 2); (2) Eli’s sons who both died in one day (1 Samuel 2); (3) Uzza who was directly smitten by God (1 Chronicles 13:9, 10); and, (4) Ananias and Sapphira who dropped dead (Acts 5).

## **GOD’S WORD**

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)**

If the Word equals God, then it logically can follow that the “fear God” verses previously mentioned can and should apply to the Word of God. That is to say, the obedient Christian should fear the written word of God. So, for example, you find in the 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm after mentioning the “law”, “testimony”, “statutes” and “commandment” of the Lord, it says: **The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. (Psalms 19:9).**

Taking a closer look at Psalm 19: The fear of the Lord, that is, the Word of the Lord, the written word; for that which David calls in this place the fear of the Lord, even in the same place he calls the law, testimony, statutes, commandments, and judgments of God. Specifically --

**The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of**

**the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. (Psalms 19:7-9).**

All these words have respect to the same thing, to wit, to the Word of God, jointly designing the glory of it. This written Word is therefore the object of a Christian's fear. This is also what David intended when he said,

**Come, ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Psalms 34:11).**

I will “teach you the fear”, that is, I will teach you the commandments, statutes, and judgments or, in a word, I will teach you the “Word” of the Lord.

Trembling at the Word of God is, even by God himself, not only taken notice of, but counted as laudable, as is evident in the case of Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:26,27). And this --

**Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. (Isaiah 66:5).**

Moreover, the way to escape dangers is to hearken to, understand, and fear the Word of God as witnessed by this story in the Exodus —

**He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: (where they were secured; but) he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field, and they were destroyed by the hail (Exodus 9:20-25).**

Now, permit me to list some additional scriptural reasons why the Word of the Lord should be feared:

- They are the words of God; he is the author – the Bible is filled with such phrases as “thus saith the Lord” and “hear the word of the Lord”, etc.
- The Word is fearful because it includes exhaustive discussion of the state of sinners in another world or place, our last state which is eternal – eternal glory or eternal fire.

- The Word is faithful, true and cannot be broken; every jot and tittle is forever. **Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matthew 24:35).**

All transgression begins at wandering from the Word of God; but, on the other side, David says:

**Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer (Psalms 17:4).**

Therefore Solomon proclaimed:

**My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings; let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart; for they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. (Proverbs 4:20-22).**

It doesn't get any better than that! Reverence the Word of the Lord, and make it your rule and director in all things.

I love you. Amen!